

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 000752

SIPDIS

NSC FOR TSHANNON AND CBARTON  
USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD  
USAID DCHA/OTI FOR RPORTER  
DEPT FOR DRL JDAVIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/03/2013  
TAGS: PHUM KDEM VE OAS  
SUBJECT: IS ANYONE KEEPING SCORE? HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS  
TALLY FEBRUARY 27-MARCH 4

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ABELARDO A. ARIAS  
FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

-----  
SUMMARY  
-----

1. (U) Growing violence since February 27 has produced a sharp rise in the number and types of human rights violations throughout Venezuela. Several local human rights organizations, Amnesty International, and the Inter-American Human Rights Commission issued statements condemning the violence and calling on the GOV to fulfill its duty to guarantee security and protect the rights of all citizens. The Democratic Coordinator (CD) maintains that only unarmed demonstrators participate in opposition marches but acknowledges that it does not control the actions of those involved in spontaneous acts of civil disobedience. End Summary.

-----  
JUMP IN HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS ALLEGATIONS  
-----

2. (C) Growing violence since February 27 has produced a sharp rise in the number and types of human rights violations throughout Venezuela. Democratic Coordinator (CD) spokesperson Rafael Narvaez said in a March 3 press briefing that nearly 400 opposition demonstrators, some as young as 14, have been jailed without due process, 36 of them in Caracas. The detainees, Narvaez said, have been beaten and tortured with electric shocks, burning, and near-suffocation. Lisette Behrens, a CD legal advisor, told poloff March 2 she is helping represent six youths detained and, she said, subsequently tortured by the National Guard (GN) February 29. According to Behrens, the youths were observing protests in the Altamira neighborhood of Caracas when they were arrested. Many detainees have been released and have given accounts of their detentions to the media, often accompanied by pictures of their alleged signs of torture. Three judges who had been ordering the release of detainees for lack of credible charges against them were fired on March 2, according to media and opposition sources.

3. (U) The director of the Venezuela Symphonic Orchestra, Carlos Eduardo Izcaray, was also taken and tortured by the GN March 1 while observing the events in Altamira, according to an email circulated by his father. Many other demonstrators and onlookers have been seriously injured by tear gas, and rubber and metal bullets, according to the CD and human rights groups. Fourteen journalists have been injured or attacked by security forces or GOV supporters while covering political disturbances since February 27, according to several media groups. COFAVIC, a human rights NGO, confirmed March 4 that nine people have died from injuries inflicted by security forces. Media and opposition reports list a small but growing number of people (seven) as "disappeared."

-----  
LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD?  
-----

4. (U) On March 1, several local human rights organizations and Amnesty International (AI) issued strongly worded statements condemning the use of violence by any party and reminding the government of its responsibility to ensure security and protect the rights of all citizens, particularly the due process rights of detainees. The Inter-American Human Rights Commission (IAHRC) followed with a statement on March 3 expressing concern for the "serious violence" that has occurred during demonstrations due to the use of "excessive force" by security forces. The IAHRC called on the GOV to preserve the rights of demonstrators, detainees, and the media, and to maintain public order strictly within the framework of human rights agreements. On March 4, AI activated its worldwide urgent action alert network, asking network members to remind Venezuelan authorities not to use

excessive force and to respect the right to peaceful demonstration. The statement reiterated AI's condemnation of violence and called on all parties to refrain from violent actions.

15. (C) The CD's Lisette Behrens told poloff March 2 that opposition marchers are always unarmed so as not to invalidate constitutional protections for peaceful demonstrators or give the GOV a chance to blame the opposition if violence breaks out. (Comment: We believe some marchers have carried weapons, and possibly used them.) But she admits that the street barricades and other random acts of civil disobedience that have erupted in Caracas and other cities are not under the CD's control. Her clear implication was that such protests are spontaneous expressions of deep anger and frustration which can lead to violence, regardless of the opposition's policy of peaceful protest.

-----  
COMMENT  
-----

16. (C) Our assessment is that the GOV was unprepared for the length, breadth, and intensity of the demonstrations. In the GOV mindset, there should not be large anti-GOV demonstrations, since supposedly only a small group opposes the GOV. In particular, the GOV has been clumsy in responding to real or perceived opposition violence, and clearly has, in many cases, not controlled its forces sufficiently. We also believe that some in the opposition are seeking to provoke GOV violence in the hopes that the military or the international community will step in. While we cannot certify all the allegations of abuse, the patterns and trends are worrisome in terms of human rights and political dialogue.  
SHAPIRO

NNNN

2004CARACA00752 - CONFIDENTIAL